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Wednesday, June 1, 2016

Buyouts, Raise, Other Issues on Agenda Ahead

After this week's break, Congress will be in session for five of the next six weeks before recessing until September, a summer break lengthened this year due to the political conventions. In the working time just ahead Congress likely will address several key issues for federal employees, although final decisions could be left until September or later—after working in September, Congress will recess again until after the elections. More at <http://www.fedweek.com/fedweek/buyouts-raise-issues-agenda-ahead/>

Limits on Veterans Preference Sought

The Senate DoD bill also contains two provisions not in the House bill regarding veterans preference, including one that "would limit the application of points for preference eligible hiring to the first appointment of a preference eligible candidate in a permanent position in the competitive service," as a Senate report describes it. That could impact not only those who have preference and who are seeking a different federal job but also other candidates for those positions who do not have preference, since they no longer would be at a disadvantage versus those who do. A second provision would repeal a "national emergency"-based exception to the general policy against hiring military retirees into federal jobs within 180 days of their retirement, out of concern that the exception has been overused.

Plan to Limit VA Employee Rights Challenged from Both Sides

Another high priority bill (S-2921), which could reach a floor vote in the Senate in the upcoming weeks, would shorten the appeals process for VA employees below the executive ranks and allow VA SESers to challenge disciplinary actions only to an internal review board. Momentum for the bill has slowed, though, as a dozen federal employee unions and management organizations have asked the Senate to delete those provisions. "If enacted, the proposals could set a precedent leading to change in other federal components that eviscerate important safeguards long intended to protect against the abuse and politicization of an impartial federal civil service," said their letter to Senate leaders. However, a sponsor of an earlier plan to impose even stricter limits, Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., has raised the prospect of blocking the measure on grounds that the existing provisions are actually too lenient toward employee misconduct. That echoes arguments made by Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., head of the veterans committee in

the House, which already has passed more restrictive language that Rubio has sponsored in the Senate.

Acceptance of Raise by Default Appears Set

Also likely to progress in the time ahead is the general government appropriations bill. A House subcommittee has approved that measure, which by remaining silent on a January 2017 federal employee raise effectively paves the way for one to be paid by default. The figure most likely will be the 1.6 percent President Obama originally recommended, although a further order in late summer would be needed to make that effective, assuming that Congress once again stays silent through the entire year on the issue. That bill also continues several long-running personnel policies, such as a general ban on FEHB plans covering abortion, along with barring the IRS from paying performance awards or other types of monetary payments to employees, or rehiring former employees, unless the individual's conduct record and personal tax compliance is considered. That bill, like most or all other appropriations bills, could be combined into a catchall measure rather than enacted individually—potentially not to happen until the post-election congressional session, with a temporary extension of current spending authority past the October 1 start of the new fiscal year enacted in the meantime.

Expert's View: The Alternative Form of Annuity

At one time newly retiring federal employees could elect to have their retirement contributions paid to them in a lump sum and, in exchange, have their annuity actuarially reduced based on their age, writes benefits expert Reg Jones. Now that applies only in very limited circumstances, he writes. You'll find his column at <http://www.fedweek.com/news/reg-jones-experts-view/>

TSP Funds Flower in May

All TSP funds posted gains in May, with the small company stock S fund up 1.81 percent, followed closely by the large company stock C fund, 1.8 percent. The international stock I fund rose 0.27 percent, the government securities G fund 0.15 percent and the bond F fund 0.08 percent. The gains for the lifecycle L funds were: Income, 0.38; 2020, 0.69; 2030, 0.91; 2040, 1.03; 2050, 1.15. For year-to-date and last-12-month returns, go to <http://www.fedweek.com/thrift-savings-plan/>.

MSPB Summarizes the Law on Suspensions

MSPB recently summarized legal policies on suspending federal employees without pay during investigations that could lead to disciplinary action, an issue that has arisen lately due to controversies over sometimes extended use of paid "administrative leave" in such situations. For a closer look, go to <http://www.fedweek.com/reports>.

COLA Count Inches toward Positive

The inflation adjustment used to set the January 2017 federal retirement COLA continues to creep toward positive territory, in April rising 0.5 percentage points for the second month in a row and now standing at -0.3 percent through seven months of the count. The count had been as low as -1.5 through December.

Overtime Rules Revision Has Little Impact, at Least for Now

Recently issued Labor Department rules regarding overtime eligibility have little immediate impact on federal employees in general, since separate policies set by OPM govern most federal workers. The rules roughly double, to \$47,476, a dollar threshold below which an employee is presumed to be eligible for overtime even if their jobs involve certain duties that ordinarily make them ineligible—"exempt," in the term of art used. The Labor Department rules apply generally to the private sector but also to the Postal Service and some other corporate-government hybrid agencies such as the Tennessee Valley Authority that fall under private sector labor laws. For other federal employees, the threshold of \$23,660 will remain in place unless OPM changes its own regs to conform with the Labor Department rules. OPM commonly changes its rules to match that department's policies when they change. However, overtime eligibility in the federal government generally is set by detailed standards taking into account the nature of the duties and the dollar threshold typically is not a determining factor.

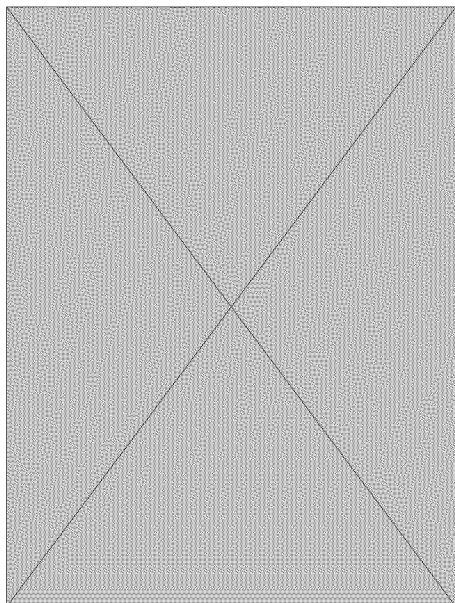
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- How to Compute Your Retirement Benefits
- CSRS Components and Potential Reductions in Annuity
- Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)
- Social Security Benefits
- Thrift Savings Plan
- FEHB, Federal Dental & Vision Program
- Medicare, Life Insurance, Long-Term Care Insurance
- Buyouts, Workers' Compensation
- Retirement Misenrollments, Common Errors and Self Identification Test
- How to Plan for Your Retirement
- The Application Process
- Taxes in Retirement: Federal and State Taxes
- Survivor Benefits, Spousal Annuities, Children Annuities
- Early Retirement: Early-Out, Will You and Should You Take the Offer?
- Leaving Before Retirement Eligibility: All Your Options
- Going Back to Work for the Government
- Life Events in Retirement: Moving, Divorce, Marry, Have Children, etc.
- Questions and Answers Section
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